

REMARKS

Claims 1, 5 – 6, and 9 – 41 are pending. Claims 2 – 4, 7 and 8 have been canceled. The applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of this application in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

In response to the rejection and statement, claim 1 has been amended to incorporate features of the claim 2 therein. Further, new independent claim 18 comprises original claims 1 and 3, new independent claim 24 comprises original claims 1 and 4, new independent claim 30 comprises original claims 1 and 7, new independent claim 36 comprises original claims 1 and 8; and claims 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 are cancelled.

Moreover, new claims 19 – 23 depending from new claim 18 have been added to contain features of the claims 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11, respectively. In the same manner, claims 25 – 29 depending from the claim 24, claims 31 – 35 depending from the claim 30, and claims 37 – 41 depending from the claim 36 have been added. In view of the above, the applicants submit that the claims are patentable.

The applicants have rewritten the claims in independent form since the office action indicated that claims 2 – 4, 7, 8 and 11 would be allowable if so re-written. However, the applicants do not concede that other features in the claims are found in the prior art.

The applicants wish to clarify for the record, if necessary, that the claims have been amended to expedite prosecution. Moreover, the applicants reserve the right to pursue the original subject matter in a continuation application.

Any narrowing amendment to the claims in the present Amendment is not to be construed as a surrender of any subject matter between the original claims and the present claims; rather this is merely an attempt at providing one or more definitions of what the applicants believe to be

suitable patent protection. In addition, the present claims provide the intended scope of protection that the applicants are seeking for this application. Therefore, no estoppel should be presumed, and the applicants' claims are intended to include a scope of protection under the Doctrine of Equivalents.

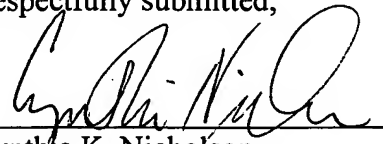
For all the reasons advanced above, the applicants respectfully submit that the claims as amended are allowable.

The office action rejects claims 1, 5, 6, 9 and 10 under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,644,134, Laidlaw et al. ("Laidlaw") in view of U.S. Patent 6,581,479, Goto et al. ("Goto"). In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the rejection is moot.

In view of the foregoing, the applicants respectfully submit that this application is in condition for allowance. A timely notice to that effect is respectfully requested. If questions relating to patentability remain, the examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone.

Please charge any unforeseen fees that may be due to Deposit Account No. 50-1147.

Respectfully submitted,


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